

2022 VCE Theatre Studies written external assessment report

General comments

High-scoring responses demonstrated skills in using theatrical terminology. In preparing for the examination, students and teachers are advised to create a terminology list and practise applying precise language to describe the qualities, functions and processes associated with the development and presentation of theatre.

High-scoring responses tended to demonstrate a strong capacity to evaluate – that is, to explain what was effective and what was not effective in a production. They integrated evaluative language and were able to show a sophisticated understanding of how production roles worked to convey meaning, create emotional responses and engage audiences. Students should practise evaluating plays studied in Units 3 and 4, drawing on key examples from the productions (and from the script for the play studied in Unit 3) to illustrate their evaluations.

The examination required an in-depth of knowledge of how the elements of theatre composition were used by production roles, and how they might be used by theatre makers. It is recommended that students interrogate the nuances and various aspects of the elements in preparing for the examination. For some production roles, students need to be more familiar with how to apply all elements. For example, make-up students might consider how motion could be implied through their design choices.

High-scoring responses also showed a good understanding of theatre technologies and their relationship to production roles. It is recommended that students explore the differences between electrical, digital and mechanical theatre technologies, and how they might work in conjunction with different production roles at different stages of production.

Unfortunately, a number of students who selected the production role of director showed a limited understanding of this role, and instead took license to discuss all design-based production roles. If students plan on referring to work by a director, they should be familiar with how to write about creating a directorial vision or the specific role the director might have in relation to other production roles.

Students are advised to avoid formulaic or prewritten answers, particularly in relation to Section B.

Specific information

This report provides sample answers, or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A

Question 1

Students were provided with script excerpts and dramaturgy from Mary Zimmerman’s *Secret in the Wings*. Students were not required to know more about the play or context other than what was provided. Students selected one production role to interpret the play. The production role mentioned in Question 1a. was considered the selected production role for all parts of Question 1. Some higher-scoring responses had a cohesive vision, which was followed through in all parts of the question, though this was not a requirement – it was possible for students to achieve high-scoring responses when their ideas were not interrelated.

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	1	5	28	66	2.6

As this question asked for an initial concept, there was no need for students to provide any other task from the planning stage in their response. High-scoring responses provided a good explanation of how work in a selected production role can help to create the world of the play. They made appropriate and specific application of one or more of the listed conventions. They also referred to specific details of the research image(s) to support or illustrate the work in the selected production role. Responses that did not score well made no reference to a selected production role, a research image, the world of the play and/or a listed convention.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

As a costume designer, the lavish heightened frills and colours of source image 5 could lead me to embrace the convention of exaggerated characterisations, incorporating aspects of traditional fairytale archetypes (e.g. maiden, witch) into my designs and then heightening them. I could achieve this heightened nature by using primary and secondary colours in the designs such as those in Image 5, drawing from colour symbolism and colour charts. I could then assign each archetype a specific colour (E.g. all courtesans in red for passion) in order to create a more visually cohesive design for the audience

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	12	30	36	20	2.7

In this question, students annotated a script excerpt from the play. Annotation could occur by labelling, highlighting and/or creating brainstorm from specific stage directions or dialogue in the excerpt. High-scoring responses provided a thorough explanation of how three specific moments in the text could inform work in the selected production role to interpret script excerpt 1. In these responses, each annotation was clearly linked to applying the element of motion and showed a sophisticated understanding of the element of motion. Responses that did not score well made no reference to a production role, or referred only to a different production role from the selected role for Question 1a. Some of these responses made reference to fewer than three specific moments in the dialogue or stage directions, ignored the element of motion or referred to the narrative in the script excerpt without mentioning how work in the selected production role might be applied to interpret script excerpt 1.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

[highlight phrase 'Darling Journal', line to annotation] As the writing in her 'Darling Journal' is the most prominent source of movement for the Princess, I could attach lace ruffs to her cuffs to heighten the languid scrawling pace of this for the audience in contrast to the frantic dancers. [highlight the phrase 'touch the ground', line to annotation] This line implies a need for total freedom of movement for the female dancers with a frantic pace and constantly morphine position, so I could design a dress skirt that split on both sides of the hop to allow for freedom. [highlight phrase 'won't you dance with us a little?', line to annotation] This line implies that her father joins in the dancing and the frenetic motion of the dance, so I could design an undershirt with long flowing sleeves that would, when he took off his coat to join them, highlight this new direction of motion while allowing him to stay visually distinct.

Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	1	11	32	36	21	2.7

High-scoring responses provided a thorough understanding of how work in the selected production role can realise the transformation of the basement to the setting for script excerpt 1. They provided specific and relevant example(s) of how one or more of the stimulus images could inform work in the production role. These responses provided an excellent understanding of how one or more exercises or tasks could be used to explore or trial an idea in the production development stage. Responses that did not score well made no reference to a production role or referred only to a different production role from the selected role for Question 1a. These responses may have had little or no reference to the setting of script excerpt 1, a stimulus image, the production development stage and/or an exercise or task used during development stage.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

As a costume designer in the development stage, I could assign the costumes of the basement and the dancing couple scene tonally distinct colour palates, borrowing from the bleached, grubby hues of the pants in Image 8 for inspiration for the basement palate, and design reversable jackets and skirts with both of these for the chorus dancers. To explore this concept, I could experiment with a range of dyes and bleaches using variants of the same white fabric swatch, attempting to determine which of these best suited the drab quality of the basement. Further, I could experiment with sewing these swatches with similarly treated thread, ensuring that the process would not negatively impact its efficacy (e.g. causing it to disintegrate). This, I would create for the audience a seamless transition between two harshly contrasting worlds.

Question 1d.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	4	7	38	35	16	2.5

High-scoring responses provided an excellent understanding of how one or more exercises or tasks could be used to refine an idea explored and/or trialled in part c. in the production development stage. They provided specific examples of safe and/or ethical work practices during the development stage. Responses that did not score well showed little understanding of the process of refining as opposed to strategies for exploring or trialling. These responses made little or no reference to application of the production role selected for Question 1, work in the selected production role from Question 1c. (e.g., a different idea), the production development stage and/or safe and/or ethical work practices.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

To refine my reversible costume idea, I could bring my prototype jackets and skirts into the rehearsal space to trial reversing them with the actors. If it turned out that the method of attaching and detaching them was taking the actors too long for the scene to progress (E.g. trouble with zippers), I could present them with alternate solutions (e.g. Velcro) until we found ones that worked for both parties. Further, I could discuss the strength of the lights being used onstage with the lighting technician, and experiment with an actor wearing the prototype under the lights to ensure the double layer of fabric would not cause overheating. By taking such precautions, we as a team would ensure the safety of the actors in the workplace.

Question 1e.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	2	12	46	26	11	3.3

Higher-scoring responses recognised what a collaboration is and does, and how the two production roles working together can emphasise the contrast. Responses that did not score well relied too heavily on the new production role to show the contrast rather than seeing how the two might work together. High-scoring responses provided a thorough explanation, demonstrating an excellent understanding of how the selected production role can collaborate with a different production role during the production presentation. There was discussion of how the element of contrast could be applied to enhance the differences between the princess and other characters in the play. Responses that did not score well provided an inadequate explanation, which may make no reference to application of the production role selected for Question 1, collaboration with a different production area, the element of contrast, or the production presentation stage (i.e., it is clearly occurring in another stage of production).

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

During the presentation stage, as a costume designer, I could dress the princess in a monochrome black and white-hued costume, indicating her black and white worldview visually for the audience. In contrast, the father and the dancing couples would be dressed in bright neon outfits of a sharply contrasting visual intensity. During the tech run, I could collaborate with the lighting designer to ensure that there was different lighting for the princess than for the rest of the cast, ensuring that she was visually distinct on stage due to her costume's monochrome nature. [...]

Question 2

Students were provided with a second scene. The selected production role needed to be different from the one used in Question 1. The production role mentioned at Question 2a. was considered the selected production role for all of Question 2.

Question 2a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	2	3	12	36	28	19	3.4

High-scoring responses provided a thorough analysis including two or more specific and relevant examples from script excerpt 2 to inform work in the selected production role. These responses linked their work to two or more examples of specific traits of the princess. They provided a high-level, clear and detailed explanation of how the chosen production role could be applied to realise the character of the princess. Low-level

responses provided an inadequate explanation that made no reference to a production role, dialogue or stage directions from script excerpt 2 or traits of the princess.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

To display the raging anger and resentment of the princess to laugh, I would gradually tense the different parts of my body, specifically engaging my arms by my side and slightly leaning forward as I aggressively grasp my dress to mention the 'hems of all my gowns'. My strained loud void placing clear diction of each word and physicality would emphasise how despite the luxuries she possesses, she does not want to be told what to do and is outraged by the kingdom's behaviour. I would also speak the line 'so then my stupid father goes' in a high pitched, mocking tone to display her annoyance of her happy, unaware father to her feelings. I would continue to mock his actions by mouthing the lines as he exclaims 'Let's have a contest', since she is narrating the moment as a past memory, this would depict her lack of serious [sic.] to the moment and lack of respect for her father. When the princess states 'we cut off his head' if the suitors fail to make her laugh, I would slow down in pact to emphasise each word as I do a cutting motion across my neck, conveying her sense of humour and fun that she has in the moment of anger.

Question 2b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	6	5	27	34	20	8	2.8

High-scoring responses provided a thorough explanation that included one or more specific and relevant examples of variation to inform work in the selected production role, a high level of understanding of how work in the selected production role can apply theatre technologies and aspects of variation to realise the moment when the first suitor attempts to make the princess laugh. Responses that did not score well provided an inadequate explanation that made no reference to application of work from the selected production role for Question 2, one or more aspects of variation, one or more aspects of theatre technologies and the character of the princess.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

The actress could imply a risking tension between herself and the actor playing the prince by slowing taking small steps around away from him as he attempts to impress her, the space between them highlighting her aversion to the man and the growing conflict between the two. She could subtly create a sense of increasing intensity of the conflict by incrementally turning her blank stare into a frown, moving lips downwards very slowly to heighten the worsening situation. As the energy of the prince becomes higher and higher, potentially running around the stage and yelling to try to make her laugh, the princess' energy may slowly lessen until she is stood away from him and completely still, unmoving. The use of projection may enhance this variation in tension as the conflict rises, the colour of the pattern projected on the floor becoming brighter and more orange to create the sense of a crescendoing interaction as the prince becomes more desperate and the princess angers and becomes more frustrated.

Section B

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
%	2	1	6	16	13	16	17	13	8	5	2	5.2

Students selected one production studied in Unit 3 from the prescribed playlist.

High-scoring responses provided an excellent evaluation of how one or more actors and one or more production roles applied one or more aspects of rhythm to realise the intended meaning of the script. They provided highly specific and relevant references to specific dialogue or stage directions from the selected play script. They showed a high level of understanding of one or more of the specific listed aspects of rhythm. They included sophisticated and consistently accurate theatrical terminology and evaluative language throughout the response. Responses that did not score well provided an inadequate analysis or evaluation that may have made no reference to work completed by one or more actors or work completed by one or more other production roles. Some included no examples of dialogue or stage directions from the selected script. Some showed very little understanding of the intended meaning of the script. Some provided a recount the narrative seen in performance without analysis or evaluation

The following is an example of a high-scoring response, selecting the play *Fun Home* based on Alison Bechdel's best-selling graphic memoir, with music by Jeanine Tesori and book and lyrics by Lisa Kron (Theatre company: Melbourne Theatre Company with co-producer Sydney Theatre Company).

The effective acting skills of Lucy Maunder as Alison (49) worked successfully with the directorial choices to enhance the play's theme of grief, consistent with Kron's written script. Maunder travelled in a large circle around the stage chasing after Adam Murphy as he prepressed Bruce Bechdel. Maunder employed a rapid pace as she circumnavigated the stage, working to enhance the highly emotional and desperate nature of her character within the scene. Maunder adopted a pained facial expression achieved through furrowed eyebrows, wide eyes and an opened downturned mouth as she exclaimed "was it because of me?" Maunder cleverly utilised a strong projection with an upward inflection on the word 'me' to communicate the internalised guilt harboured by Alison for her Father's suicide. Maunder paired this with a part body gesture of reaching her hands upwards in front of her at a quick rhythm, enhancing Alison's sense of desperation to seek answers from her father, however the strategic blocking of the actor's apart on stage meant Bruce was always out of reach, effectively enhancing Alison's inability to resolve her past.

As Alison (9) prepared to attend a party, the actor ran onstage at an upbeat and energetic tempo, successfully communicating the character's enthusiasm and excitement. The actor paired this with a happy facial expression achieved through raised eyebrows, wide eyes and an upturned mouth. The effective directorial choice to have the character blocked next to Adam Murphy as the manipulative Bruce Bechdel, cleverly utilised the height difference between the actors to establish Bruce as having a high status and wielding control within the scene. As Murphy leant down at a slow rhythm to speak with a patronising tone, the actor portraying Alison (9) shifted to a saddened facial expression with furrowed eyebrows, downcast eyes and a downturned mouth. The actor sang with a soft projection "maybe not right now: as she exited the stage at a slow tempo. The shift in rhythm between Alison (9)s entrance and exit from the scene clearly realised how the character was belittled by her father, establishing the nature of the complex father-daughter relationship, consistent with Kron's written script.

Section C

Question 1

Students selected one production studied in Unit 4 from the prescribed playlist. This production must have been different to the production studied in Unit 3 (and evaluated in Section B).

Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	1	1	14	37	28	19	3.5

High-scoring responses included a thorough analysis of how acting and one or more areas of design conveyed the intended meaning of the selected play. They provided a highly specific reference to a moment from the selected play in performance. Responses that did not score well provided an inadequate analysis that made no reference to work completed by an actor, work completed by an area of design, a specific moment from the play and/or the intended meaning of the play

Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	4	3	16	41	24	11	3.1

High-scoring responses provided a thorough evaluation of how acting and the areas of design discussed in part a. interrelated to establish and/or maintain the actor–audience relationship in the specific moment of the play.

Responses that did not score well provided an inadequate evaluation or analysis that made no reference to work completed by an actor, work completed by an area of design, the specific moment discussed in part a. and/or the actor–audience relationship.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response, selecting the play *Don Juan* by A Slightly Isolated Dog, based on the original play by Moliere (Theatre company: A Slightly Isolated Dog and Nicholas Clark Management]).

Selected moment: The moment where Don Juan is on a boat

1a. The acting of Jonathan Price as Phillip taking on the role of Don Juan coupled with the set items of the large tarp and cardboard box portraying the boat, worked cohesively to illustrate the intended meaning that although a prominent powerful character, Don Juan is sometimes inferior and still afraid. To convey Don Juan's fear, Jonathan Price furrows his brows downwards and widens his eyes to illustrate concern. As well as this, Jonathan Price narrows his gait and keeps his arms next to his body to reduce the acting space he is taking up to illustrate how his fear makes him the smaller person in this scene. The tarp used for set is very large and stretches out to cover three quarters of the acting space to convey the insignificance of Don Juan whilst turning away from the brothers. The tarp is also a grey colour to convey the meaning that he is in trouble, as seen by the tarp's colour being a dull shade.

1b. The interrelationships between the acting of Jonathan Price and the set of the large tarp successfully establish and maintain the actor-audience relationship of participation. The audience is brilliantly welcomed to join in the scene and hold the handles on the edges of the tarp to effectively move the set of the tarp up and down beautifully creating the motion of an ocean. This fluidly maintained the actor-audience relationship and is methodically reconfirmed with the actor Jonathan Price, smartly moving his body up and down by stretching his knees up then bending his legs to nicely create the

illusion that his character, Don Juan, is on a boat on a wavy and unsettled sea. His acting choices to brilliantly move cohesively with the motion of the tarp, whilst the audience is manipulating the set piece of the tarp enjoyably to their liking, smoothly ensures that the audience feels part of the specific moment.